



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## STATE VETERANS CEMETERY

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting their first Memorial Day Program and ribbon cutting ceremony at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery. It's history in the making! The event will be held on Monday, May 31, at 2:00 pm (CT) at the site (25965 477<sup>th</sup> Avenue) in Sioux Falls.

Together, we have enabled this ground to serve as a shrine dedicated to the memories of the men and women to whom we all owe a great debt. South Dakota has been blessed with an abundance of such men and women – whose collective courage and commitment have allowed us to flourish as a nation and as a people united. It is most fitting we should spend this Memorial Day dedicating the newest resting place for our veterans here in South Dakota.

With all the earthwork and landscaping that has been done, parking is very limited at the Cemetery. We are encouraging our guests to utilize transportation to and from the cemetery that will be provided by River Cities Public Transit. Bus rides to the event will originate at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street) starting at noon and will run until 1:45 pm.

Immediately following the ceremony, busses will begin transportation back to the Alliance Building. Upon your arrival at the Alliance, we encourage you to join us as our celebration continues with a free meal and free entertainment. The dinner will be provided from our partners with Keystone Treatment Centers and entertainment will be courtesy of the El Riad Shrine Chanters.

We hope you can join us for the Memorial Day Program as we dedicate South Dakota's Veterans Cemetery.



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# A SALUTE TO OUR FRONTLINE WARRIORS

May 6 to May 12 is National Nurses Week. It's our opportunity to shine the spotlight on our unseen heroes who are taking care of our veterans throughout this state, but especially our nursing team at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

This past year tested our tenacity, but we all stayed true to our vision, mission, and goals and maintained our commitment to serving our veterans and their families. This year's challenges afforded us the opportunity to embrace innovation, build new relationships, and redefine our business practices and safety procedures.

To all our nurses and nursing staff that serve on the front-line, thank you for your commitment, dedication, kindness, your hours of hard work, and your healing touch. We are forever thankful for your unselfishness. You will be in our hearts forever!



## SPECIAL DAYS TO HONOR OUR HEROES

Did you know that the entire month of May is designated as National Military Appreciation Month?  
Did you know that the entire month of May is designated as the month of Military Caregiver?  
Did you know that the Friday before Mother's Day is Military Spouses Day?  
Did you know that May 13th is Children of Fallen Patriots Day?



# VA.GOV SITE BECOMES CENTRAL LOGIN FOR ACCESSING BENEFITS

Veterans and their families may begin accessing their United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits and services on the new and user-friendly [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov) website starting April 30.

Users will be able to access information about VA benefits and services through a single site rather than through multiple locations.

All benefits-related features previously located in the [eBenefits](https://www.ebenefits.va.gov) web portal will be available on [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov). Veterans are encouraged to start logging into the site using their current Digital Service (DS) Logon or creating a new account using ID.me.

"The VA.gov offers veterans an enhanced site in terms of usability and security with the implementation of two-factor authentication," said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. "The most frequently used features are now readily accessible on one website to include the ability to file a disability claim, check the status of a claim or change direct deposit and payment history."

The eBenefits site will remain functional through March 31, 2022, to give veterans an opportunity to complete claims started on the platform. Thereafter, VA.gov becomes the single source solution to access VA benefit and service information online.

U.S. Digital Service worked with thousands of veterans to test the new and improved VA.gov. The Department wanted to ensure veterans deemed the site functional before migrating veterans' data.

You can learn more about this new site at: [VA.gov](https://www.va.gov).

# SDDVA ATTENDS BRANDON LOYALTY DAY PARADE



Team Brown represented the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs at the Loyalty Day Parade in Brandon May 1.

Looks like there was no shortage



of smiles from the Department team!!!!



# EMPLOYER SUPPORT INTEGRAL TO SDNG MISSION

Civilian employers of National Guard members provide an integral level of support to the South Dakota National Guard mission. Employers add to a strong national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard.

Businesses and organizations support the readiness of their National Guard employees by providing time off work, schedule flexibility, and other assistance, in order for them to complete their monthly and annual training periods, or when activated in support of domestic operations and wartime missions.

“Employers provide a pivotal role in their support to the National Guard and their Guard member employees,” said Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general.

“Without their support, it would make it more difficult for our service members to be ready when they are called upon.”

Of the SDNG’s more than 4,200 members, over 3,100 of them serve on a part-time basis while pursuing a civilian career or higher education goals.

This employer support provides National Guard members with the peace of mind and flexibility they need to leave their civilian jobs to prepare and focus on their military training and job duties or when activated for a state or federal mission.

Just last year, the SDNG deployed 490 service members in support of federal deployments to more than a dozen countries worldwide. The SDNG also activated nearly 400 soldiers and airmen for state response to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing over 35,000 man-days of support, and over 200 provided support to wildland fire, search and rescue, and civil unrest events.

Service members’ knowing they still have their job to return home to adds to their peace of mind and sense of security, allowing them to focus on this mission.

Employers also add to that peace of mind by ensuring their employees receive re-employment rights or any additional pay, benefits, or promotions they would of otherwise been granted or eligible for while away serving their state and country.

The relationship between employers and their service members is vital to a successful partnership, and communication and understanding is key. Service members need to ensure they provide advance notice to their employers about upcoming military training or pending deployments, and if deployed, both need to understand what their employment and re-employment rights are by law.

Through ESGR, the level of South Dakota employer support has been recognized throughout the state and nation. Over the last 15 years, more than 12 South Dakota businesses and organizations have been nominated nationally for the Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, with five receiving the award. The Freedom Award is the highest recognition given by the U.S. Government to employers for their outstanding support of their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.



# SD ARMY GUARD UNITS HOST RECRUITMENT EVENT NEAR LAKE OAHE

Potential future South Dakota Army National Guard soldiers participated in a recruiting event held at Oahe Dam, near Fort Pierre, April 24. South Dakota recruiters coordinated with the 153rd Engineer Battalion and the 200th and 211th Engineer Companies during their units' field training exercise to host a recruiting event that demonstrated soldier tasks and skills for different military occupational specialties (MOS), giving potential recruits and newly enlisted soldiers a chance to get close and personal with equipment and operations.



"This is an opportunity for us to get into the field and do some rehearsals for our upcoming annual training," said Lt. Col. Jason Thomson, 153rd Battalion commander. "We exercised a lot of different things and tied in really good MOS training with a recruiting event to give back to the community and to show our families what we do out in the field."

This event was also supported by Company C, 1/189th Aviation Regiment who brought in HH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to support both the training units and the recruiting event with air support for medical evacuations and to display the helicopters for the community.

The host units provided weapons training with blanks, dismounted foot patrol training with paintballs, hands-on weapon and equipment displays.

"This event makes me feels like I'm part of something bigger, seeing that I can be out there building bridges and helping the community," said Joshua Strand, recent recruit to the SDARNG. "I'm very excited."

These events provide exposure to daily operations and military procedures, and helps those thinking about joining the National Guard see what a day in the life of a soldier would be like.

"This event has been tremendous and it helps to put the civilian right into the middle of the action of training operations. This is often their first experience in the military, and they are saying it is amazing," said Sgt.



1st Class Dan Heil, SDARNG recruiter. "Often events are static displays of equipment and weapons to show them how they work but they aren't as good as this. For them to see this in full play is what makes this opportunity truly incredible."



# SDNG AND RCFD TRAIN TOGETHER FOR HAZMAT RESPONSE

The South Dakota National Guard's 82nd Civil Support Team trained alongside personnel from the Rapid City Fire Department for their annual hazardous materials training in Rapid City at Fire Station 4, April 28-29.

The joint training provides both organizations the opportunity to refresh skills and knowledge of hazardous materials, apply techniques and tools used to safely contain them, and share best practices when responding to hazmat incidences.

The 82nd CST is an all-hazards response team capable of detecting chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) agents and substances. The team provides technical assessment, advice and assistance to civilian authorities and agencies when responding to emergencies and disasters involving CBRNE materials.

The training involved about two dozen CST members and firefighters from the RCFD's Station 4 and 6, which includes personnel that specialize in decontamination and hazmat.

The training involved CST members and firefighters teaming up in small groups and rotating through a series of stations to work with simulators, substance sampling and site characteristics. The stations included several kits and simulators to address leaks with different types of cylinders: 150 pound, one ton, and railcar-type cylinders.



The training also involves the teams wearing their hazmat protective suits with a self-contained breathing apparatus. Training together like this enhances communication between the teams.

Another advantage of the training is to strengthen relationships and coordination between both organizations.

# 152ND CSSB WELCOMED TO BROOKINGS COMMUNITY

Any time the South Dakota Army National Guard is able to host a ribbon cutting, it's a special occasion. A ribbon cutting ceremony and open house was held by the 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion in Brookings, May 1, and officially welcomed the Unit to the community.

The event held special significance for the Unit, community members and many in attendance. The 152nd called Pierre home from its inception in 2007 until November 2020, when the Unit moved to Brookings as part of a re-stationing plan.

Capt. Travis Tipton, commander of the headquarters company, says that the move to Brookings makes sense from a service perspective, because it locates the battalion closer to the companies it supports along the I-29 and I-90 corridors. Serving the communities of the 152nd is important to Tipton.

Brig. Gen. Michael Oster, assistant adjutant general of the SDARNG, served as the battalion commander for the 152nd from 2011 to 2014, which included a deployment to Afghanistan. He acknowledged the dedication of the soldiers in his remarks.



"The 152nd just returned from Iraq last summer and that was their second deployment in less than 10 years," Oster said during the ceremony. "Then just a few months after getting home, we asked them to move locations. That's asking a lot, and the 152nd delivered."

Brookings Mayor Keith Corbett, a retired brigadier general for the SDARNG, shared the community's gratitude for the 152nd. "We're so excited to welcome you to Brookings, so excited to have you here. Thank you for making Brookings your home," Corbett said during the ceremony.

Oster, a former Brookings resident, knew the soldiers of the CSSB would get the strong community support Corbett referenced. "I fully expected the 152nd would get a warm embrace from Brookings and that's exactly what happened," Oster said. "The South Dakota National Guard loves serving this community."



# VA ONE-STEP TODAY CAMPAIGN PROMOTES VETERAN MENTAL WELLNESS

As part of Mental Health Month, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs launched [1 Step Today](#) to provide guidance curated by veterans to inspire them to start on a path toward recovery, well-being and a healthier tomorrow, by taking one step at a time.

The new endeavor features mental health tips and advice from veterans and for veterans.

“Connecting with others, finding a new passion, picking up a new hobby, rediscovering joy, learning to forgive or reaching out for support and resources are integral to having positive mental health,” said Veteran Health Administration’s Acting Under Secretary for Health Richard Stone, M.D. “These and other activities can boost a veteran’s mood, enhance their self-esteem, and help them to overcome their challenges, either on their own or with support from the VA.”

Throughout the month of May and beyond, VA encourages veterans and their families to visit [MakeTheConnection.net/MHM](https://MakeTheConnection.net/MHM) to learn more about mental health resources, sources of support for their mental health journey and treatment options in their communities. The web site connects Veterans to video testimonials and real-world advice from Veterans and others.

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

**1 STEP TODAY**  
to start feeling better

[Find Local Support](#)

[PLAY VIDEO](#)

### Ten Ideas to Get Started

from Veterans like you

Explore these ideas — things you can start doing *today* — that have helped many Veterans jump-start their recovery. Trying at least one suggestion from this list can make a difference in your health and well-being.

1 Find inspiration in fellow Veterans	6 Open up
2 Create something	7 Talk to a pro
3 Try. Then try again	8 Discover what's available
4 Connect with people	9 Get active
5 Spark your passion	10 Learn to forgive

SHARE

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# LAW EXPANDS VETERAN HOUSING BENEFITS

May is National Moving Month and many veterans may find themselves moving to a new address as they take advantage of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expanded [home loan program](#), which now includes additional benefits for eligible borrowers.

The VA is currently implementing [Public Law 116-315](#) containing three key loan provisions for Vietnam War era Veterans, eligible National Guard members, veterans, and certain surviving spouses with VA-guaranteed loans.

“The law, known as the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 offers new and renewed homeownership possibilities,” said Acting VA Under Secretary for Benefits Thomas Murphy. “These few changes can have a significant impact on our current homeowners, especially for those who were previously ineligible but now have the opportunity to use the benefits they have earned.”

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, an estimated 35 million people will relocate this year, with most taking place between the start of the peak season for moving in May through September. It’s possible that these numbers could increase with the following expansions to the program:

1. Expanded criteria for eligibility among Vietnam Era Veterans to those whose wartime service began on or after Nov. 1, 1955. The previous start date to qualify for the VA home loan benefit as a Vietnam Era Veteran was Feb. 28, 1961.
2. Enhanced access to service members and some veterans of the National Guard. The new statutory authority extends eligibility to members of the National Guard who have been mobilized to perform full-time guard duty for at least 90 cumulative days, with 30 days of that service being consecutive.
3. Service members, veterans and certain survivors with VA-guaranteed home loans or VA direct loans whose residences have been substantially damaged or destroyed in an area that has been declared a major disaster by the President are now eligible to be charged a first time use funding fee on a VA-guaranteed loan rather than a subsequent use funding fee. The borrower’s next VA-guaranteed loan must be for the repair of the damaged or destroyed residence or purchase or construction of a new home closed within three years of the Presidential declaration of the disaster.

For more information go to [VA’s Loan Guaranty page](#).



# ENROLLMENT APPLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE FOR ACCELERATED PROGRAM TO PREPARE VETERANS FOR HIGH-DEMAND CAREERS

As part of the [American Rescue Plan](#), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is accepting applications from veterans interested in the [Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program](#).

VRRAP gives eligible veterans who lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic access to employment reeducation to qualify for high-demand occupations.

Veterans participating in VRRAP will receive up to 12 months of tuition and fees and a monthly housing allowance based on Post-9/11 GI Bill rates. A veteran must meet the following criteria for eligibility:

- Be at least 22 years old but not more than 66 years old.
- Be unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Not be eligible for GI Bill or [Veteran Readiness and Employment](#) benefits.
- Not be enrolled in a federal or state jobs program.
- Not be receiving VA disability compensation because you are unable to work.
- Not be receiving unemployment compensation, including any enhanced benefits under the [CARES Act](#).

The VRRAP [webpage](#) provides information about participating educational institutions and more.

VRRAP was enacted March 11 and is part of the [American Rescue Plan](#), a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus package, with aid targeted to assist individuals and businesses recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program ends 21 months after enactment and is limited to a maximum of 17,250 participants and up to \$386 million.





**A 2K WALK & ROLL TO  
SUPPORT HOMELESS  
VETERANS & PROMOTE  
HEALTH AND WELLNESS**



**Wednesday, May 19**

Join us at 12:00 p.m. on the front lawn to kick-off our event with Mayor Paul TenHaken!

- Walk/roll a 2K -pick a time that works best in your day
- Try Yoga on the lawn at 11:00 a.m. or 12:45 p.m. or
- Try Tai Chi on the lawn at 11:30 a.m. or 12:15 p.m.

To help support homeless Veterans in our area, consider donating some of the following items that are needed most: *Laundry baskets, cleaning supplies, broom, mop, laundry detergent, toilet paper, and/or feminine hygiene products* .

Donations can be dropped off at Voluntary Services or  
any one of the employee screening tables,  
Monday – Friday from 5:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

E-Donations can also be made by visiting  
<https://www.sioxfalls.va.gov/giving/donate.asp>

Scroll to 'To donate, click HERE'

Choose the Needy Veterans Fund

\*Donations are optional and not required to participate in the VA2K.

POC: Kristin Aeilts, RN Employee Whole Health Coordinator, EXT. 6189



**COME ON OUT AND  
TAKE A STROLL WITH US.**



# UPCOMING EVENTS

May 15—LCPL Conrad Flying Horse Bridge Dedication—McIntosh High School Football Field—10:00 am (MT)  
 May 19—11th Annual VA2K Walk and Roll—Sioux Falls VA Medical Center—12:00 noon (CT)  
 May 31—State Veterans Cemetery Memorial Day Program and Ribbon Cutting—2:00 pm (CT)  
 Jun 1—PVT David Crow and PVT Dale Crow Bridge Dedication—Bison High School—2:00 pm (MT)  
 June 11—VABHCS Pine Ridge Stand Down and Enrollment Fair—Pine Ridge Pow Wow Grounds—10:00 am—  
 2:00 pm (MT)  
 Jun 13—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—Begins at Military Heritage Alliance—Sioux Falls (1600  
 W. Russell Street)—Registration 12:30 pm (CT) and ride begins at 2:30 pm (CT)  
 Jun 17-20—VFW 91st State Convention—Kelly Inn (1607 E. HWY 50)—Yankton  
 June 24-27—American Legion State Convention—Crossroads (100 4th ST SW)—Huron  
 Jul 21—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Military Heritage Alliance Building—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)  
 Aug 16-18—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre  
 Aug 23—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser at Barrel House—Sioux Falls (4701 E. 54th Street)  
 Oct 23—Midwest Honor Flight Hangar Dance at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—Sioux Falls  
 (1600 W. Russell Street)



**HONOR RIDE**  
MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT

*"RIDING TO KEEP THEM FLYING"*

**Sunday, June 13, 2021 | 2:30 PM**

Registration begins at 12:30 PM at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance. Honor a Veteran you know and ride to raise funds for Midwest Honor Flight. Ride includes a slow salute past the Sioux Falls VA Hospital before an escort to the new South Dakota State Cemetery.

**MORE INFORMATION & PRE-REGISTRATION:**  
**MIDWESTHONORFLIGHT.ORG/RIDE**

Midwest Honor Flight is a 100% volunteer organization. All proceeds from this event go directly towards future Honor Flight and more importantly, our local Veterans.

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